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Chairman: Mr. TSHERING (Bhutan)

CONTENTS

AGENDA ITEM 107: ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN (continued)

AGENDA ITEM 165: IMPLEMENTATION OF THE OUTCOME OF THE FOURTH WORLD CONFERENCE ON WOMEN: ACTION FOR EQUALITY, DEVELOPMENT AND PEACE (continued)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.20 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 107: ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN (continued) (A/50/3, A/50/38, A/50/110, A/50/163, A/50/215-S/1995/475, A/50/257/Rev.1-E/1995/61/Rev.1, A/50/346, A/50/369, A/50/378, A/50/398, A/50/425-S/1995/787, A/50/538, A/50/691, A/50/747-E/1995/126; A/CONF.177/20)

AGENDA ITEM 165: IMPLEMENTATION OF THE OUTCOME OF THE FOURTH WORLD CONFERENCE ON WOMEN: ACTION FOR EQUALITY, DEVELOPMENT AND PEACE (continued) (A/50/744)

1. The CHAIRMAN drew attention to document A/C.3/50/L.1/Add.1/Rev.3 on the status of the Committee's documentation. The financial constraints under which the United Nations was currently operating had resulted in a reduction of services and the situation could not be expected to change in the near future. He thanked the members of the Third Committee for their understanding and hoped that, despite documentation delays and other interruptions, the Committee would be able to complete its work.

2. Mrs. REGAZOLI (Argentina), speaking on agenda item 107, said that, in order to save time, her delegation had decided to simply distribute the text of its statement on the item.

3. Mr. COLOMA (Chile) said that the Beijing Conference showed that the international community was becoming more aware of the existence of various forms of discrimination against women and of the need to overcome them so that women's participation in development would be more equitable. States had primary responsibility for following up the Conference by ensuring the implementation of the commitments made in the Platform for Action.

4. His country was determined to respect those commitments and had set up at ministerial level a National Women's Service responsible for proposing planning and coordinating policies and programmes for women. The Equal Opportunity Plan drawn up by the Service, addressed the main themes of the Platform for Action and provided a structure for its implementation through coordinated activities at the interministerial level. The principal areas of action were poverty eradication, education, employment and political and social participation. The success of the Conference follow-up process would depend on concerted efforts and, especially, on the elimination of behaviours and attitudes which encouraged discrimination against women.

5. Within the United Nations system, the follow-up process should be guided by precise, measurable objectives, which was why elaboration of the revised system-wide medium-term plan for the advancement of women was so important. The Economic and Social Council had a central role to play in ensuring inter-agency coordination and cooperation and it would be useful to involve Bretton Woods institutions and the World Trade Organization. Nevertheless, each organ should be given precise responsibilities in order to avoid duplication of activities and the mandate of the Commission on the Status of Women should be strengthened. His delegation endorsed the proposal to establish a high-level post in the Office of the Secretary-General whose holder would act as adviser to the Secretary-General on gender issues and help to ensure system-wide implementation

of the Platform for Action. While noting the Secretary-General's proposal to establish a high-level board to address those issues, his delegation felt that the proposal should be the subject of further debate.

6. Ms. ARYSTANBEKOVA (Kazakstan) said that the main task to be carried out in the wake of the Fourth World Conference on Women was to mobilize efforts at all levels to ensure the implementation of the Platform for Action adopted by the Conference. Countries with economies in transition, such as her own, must be able to count on United Nations bodies, particularly the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), to help them draw up economic and social development programmes for women in that region of the world. The Division for the Advancement of Women in the United Nations Secretariat also had an important role to play in that regard.

7. Her delegation had participated actively in the work of the Fourth World Conference on Women. In her statement to the Conference, the wife of the President of the Republic of Kazakstan, Mrs. Nazarbaeva, had described the problems facing women in that part of the world. She had mentioned, in particular, the environmental disaster caused by the nuclear tests at Semipalatinsk and the threat to the health of local populations posed by the drying up of the Aral Sea.

8. According to paragraph 293 of the Platform for Action, Governments had the primary responsibility for implementing the Platform. In that connection, she wished to emphasize the social character of the economic reforms undertaken by her country. The Government had set up a council responsible for issues concerning the family, women and population policy, one of whose main tasks was to improve the situation of women in all areas. Similarly, her country's labour laws were designed, inter alia, to protect women's jobs. An employment division had been created within the Government to ensure social protection for all unemployed persons, including women. It was in that context that the International Labour Organization and the Ministry of Labour of Kazakstan were currently executing a project on "Restructuring of the local economy and regulation of employment".

9. Her Government intended to do its utmost to implement the decisions taken at Beijing, for the progress of humankind depended ultimately on improving the status of women in the world.

10. Mr. TESSEMA (Ethiopia) welcomed the fact that the Platform for Action of the Fourth World Conference on Women proposed strategic objectives and action to advance the status of women into the twenty-first century. The Platform for Action also addressed the problem of financing, which had thus far been a hindrance to actions to empower women in developing countries. If Governments and the international community honoured their obligations in that regard, substantial progress could be made before the end of the century.

11. Among the critical areas of concern identified in the Platform for Action, his Government attached particular importance to the eradication of poverty, which had aggravated traditional discriminatory practices against women and was a factor in their inequality. Only when the burden of poverty was alleviated could women fully enjoy their human rights. The provision of clean water,

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adequate nutrition and satisfactory health services was a fundamental right of women which needed to be recognized. Access to credit, land and other resources should also be accorded prime importance.

12. The question of the settlement of armed conflicts was another critical area of concern, especially for regions such as Africa where women were the primary victims of such conflicts. The women of Ethiopia, having recently emerged from a prolonged and devastating war, were well aware of the importance of peace to their development and social equality. That was why, in the implementation of the Platform for Action in Ethiopia, priority would be given to women who had suffered most during the civil war.

13. The Constitution of Ethiopia, which had been adopted with the full participation of women, gave them equality with men in marriage, protected them against sexist laws, customs and practices and guaranteed their right to own and inherit property on equal terms with men. The Constitution contained provisions entitling women to remedial and affirmative action, with a view to enabling them to participate in political, economic and social life and gain access to positions in public and private institutions on an equal footing with men. A national policy to promote equality for women had also been adopted which would facilitate access by rural women to basic social services, alleviate their burden of work and eliminate prejudices and practices based on the idea of male supremacy.

14. The promulgation of laws to empower women was only a beginning; the real problem was to ensure that those laws were implemented. To that end, the necessary institutions must be established and the necessary budgetary resources provided. That had been done in his country through the establishment of a women's affairs office within the Prime Minister's office, whose task it was to coordinate activities undertaken by local governments, NGOs and donors. All regional governments, as well as ministries and agencies, were endeavouring to incorporate a gender dimension into their programmes.

15. Thanks to that institutional and legal framework in his country, women should soon see their situation improve especially since the new party in power was fully committed to empowering women as part of its five-year development programme and would ensure that the necessary resources were allocated to that end, within budget constraints. His Government hoped that the international community would provide assistance to countries such as Ethiopia which were anxious to honour the commitments made at international conferences, since those commitments conformed to national priorities. Only with the support of international financial institutions and multilateral and bilateral donors could poor countries such as Ethiopia that had been ravaged by war and drought fully honour their international obligations.

16. Mr. TELLES RIBEIRO (Brazil) said that the Beijing Conference had provided an opportunity not only to evaluate the implementation of earlier decisions but also to propose new ways for achieving equality between men and women. The challenge now was to implement the Platform for Action adopted at that Conference and to take measures at the national and international levels to attain its goals. The United Nations should play a leading role in that process. In that regard, his Government had stressed repeatedly the outstanding

contribution made by the United Nations to raising women's awareness of their rights. His Government had increased its financial contribution to the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), in recognition of the work done by the Fund throughout the world, and would continue to cooperate closely with it. It also supported the activities undertaken by the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW).

17. In many countries, the implementation of the Platform for Action to give women access to power and equal participation would not be accomplished without a broad strategy for strengthening their role in the economic and social fields. Poverty, unemployment and social exclusion were among the problems that affected women particularly. Structural solutions were needed, not only for the benefit of women themselves but also for the strengthening of democracy and the promotion of development. The expansion of the credit system, enabling women to develop micro-enterprises, could be of the utmost importance for creating jobs and raising incomes.

18. Education was also essential for eliminating the inequalities between men and women that persisted in different parts of the world. Equal opportunities in education, the eradication of illiteracy by the year 2000 and better access to vocational training, specialization and scientific and technological innovations demanded continuous efforts in order to achieve true social development. His country had begun to translate the recommendations of the Beijing Conference into action. The Government, together with civil society, was sponsoring a credit programme for the most disadvantaged segments of the population. Those responsible for the programme were working closely with the National Council for Women's Rights in order to take into account the specific needs of women, particularly women heads of household. Despite the progress made in his country in the area of education, women continued to suffer discrimination in the workplace in terms of jobs and salaries. The National Council for Women's Rights was currently examining ways to solve that problem in accordance with the Beijing Platform for Action.

19. In the area of health care, including maternal health and reproductive rights, Brazil's Constitution contained provisions that protected single mothers, guaranteed four months of maternity leave and provided access to family planning services. An innovative policy had been introduced to reduce the rate of maternal mortality and early pregnancy, prevent sexually transmitted diseases and improve access to safe methods of contraception.

20. Increasing participation by women in the executive and legislative branches, although their numbers were still small, was an encouraging trend in Brazilian society. In the spirit of the Beijing Conference, the Brazilian Congress had recently established that at least 20 per cent of candidates for municipal elections must be women. The National Council for Women's Rights was also signing protocols with the mayors of the main Brazilian cities for the implementation of the Platform for Action.

21. Mr. PASHAYEV (Azerbaijan) said that his delegation attached great importance to the Declaration and Platform for Action adopted at the Beijing Conference, in view of the impact which those provisions could have on world development. It hoped they would be implemented without delay.

22. In Azerbaijan, the status of women could not be separated from the social and humanitarian problems caused in that country by the difficulties of a transition economy, war and the presence of more than a million refugees and displaced persons as a result of the occupation by Armenian forces of 20 per cent of the national territory. Faced with so many obstacles, Azerbaijani women did not have the means to realize their full potential.

23. His Government attached great importance to the implementation of resolution 39/2 of the Commission on the Status of Women, relating to the release of women and children who had been taken hostage in armed conflicts and imprisoned. The release of women hostages throughout the world, particularly the 486 Azerbaijani women and children held captive by the Armenians, as well as the settlement of the problem of displaced and refugee women, was an issue of fundamental importance. It was impossible to speak of equality in the field of education, health care or involvement in decision-making, unless the physical security of women was assured. In the view of his Government, as long as there remained even one woman hostage in the world, it meant that the world had not moved a single step towards assuring the fundamental rights of women.

24. Mr. KARIM (Bangladesh) said that, in his view, the Fourth World Conference on Women had been the culminating event of 1995. He agreed with Ms. Mongella that at the Beijing Conference, a revolution had begun and there was no going back. The Conference had outlined a number of commitments and broad perimeters for their implementation. Governments and the international community must develop strategies, mobilize resources, and review laws, policies and programmes, and the United Nations must coordinate all those efforts. In that regard, his delegation welcomed the Secretary-General's commitment to integrating the gender perspective into all aspects of the work of the Organization, as indicated in the report on the implementation of the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women (A/50/744). His delegation hoped that the Secretary-General would also implement the other recommendations addressed to him in the Platform. It underscored the need to strengthen the mandate of relevant mechanisms for the advancement of women in the United Nations, including the regional commissions and called for a reconsideration of the proposed merger of UNIFEM and INSTRAW.

25. Although the Secretary-General was right in wanting to streamline the activities of the Organization, that did not mean that he should question the recommendation made in the Platform regarding the establishment of a high-level post whose incumbent would have the exclusive mandate to serve as his adviser on gender issues and to be responsible for the system-wide implementation of the Platform. His delegation's concern arose from the continued marginalization of women and women's issues at the United Nations. His delegation had also taken note of the proposal to establish a high-level advisory board for the advancement of women and of the proposed inter-agency task force. It would like to have more information on both proposals before presenting its views. Finally, the question of resources remained the crucial factor in the implementation of the Platform. That was particularly true for the developing countries, especially the least developed countries. It was to be hoped that the bilateral and multilateral financial institutions would be willing to reinforce and complement the efforts of Governments.

26. The society of Bangladesh believed in the equal partnership of women and men in all human endeavours. The constitution not only guaranteed gender equality and equal rights for women, but it also contained special provisions for affirmative action aimed at overall development of women. Since the mid-1970s, a number of programmes had been implemented to integrate women into the mainstream of development efforts in the country. In 1978, the Ministry of Women's Affairs had been established to strengthen that process, and the Prime Minister, Ms. Khaleda Zia, was herself the Chair of the National Council for Women's Development, which was responsible for overseeing the activities of all ministries in that regard.

27. The national programme and plan of action that had been formulated in Bangladesh on the basis of the Beijing Conference was aimed at further integrating women into all sectors of activity and increasing their participation in decision-making, particularly by reserving a certain number of parliamentary seats and civil service posts for women.

28. Legislative measures had been taken in Bangladesh to address violence and discrimination against women. Those measures included provisions concerning the minimum age for marriage, prohibition of dowry, punitive measures to address dowry-related violence and trafficking in women. Finally, over the last two decades, the emphasis in Bangladesh had been on programmes aimed at providing women with access to and control over productive resources. That was why the Government had invested heavily in the education of the girl child and of women. It had adopted a plan of action for the period 1991-2000 to address the particular situation of the girl child. Girls received special stipends, free primary education and the benefits of the "food-for-education programme". Moreover, 60 per cent of the posts of primary school teachers had been reserved for women. Despite those measures, women still bore a disproportionate burden of poverty. The Government attached high priority to addressing the growing feminization of poverty, and was being supported in that effort by non-governmental organizations.

29. Mrs. BOUKCHINA (Tunisia) said that her country, which was a member of the Commission on the Status of Women and of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, had participated actively in the preparatory work for the Beijing Conference, as well as in the Dakar and Amman conferences. Her Government had also hosted an African conference of experts and a Mediterranean forum.

30. After her country had achieved independence in 1956, its leaders had chosen to make women full partners in the construction of modern Tunisia. Their policy was aimed at eliminating the exclusion of women and all forms of marginalization, particularly poverty, by implementing structural adjustment programmes and providing assistance to the most underprivileged sectors, including women. A programme of integrated rural development had also been instituted. Thanks to an equitable distribution of wealth, poverty now affected only 5 per cent of the population; moreover, the rate of economic growth was close to 4 per cent, while population growth was only 1.9 per cent.

31. A national literacy programme had been launched in order to reduce the illiteracy rate among women, which currently stood at around 35 per cent. In

addition, since women were the least skilled workers on the job market, although they accounted for nearly 22 per cent of the active population, a vocational education plan had been set up to remedy that situation, and science programmes had been developed to encourage girls to receive scientific and technical education. Since education had been made compulsory, 96 per cent of all girls were in primary school; girls accounted for nearly 48 per cent of the secondary school population and over 42 per cent of students in higher education.

32. In the field of health, the Government had set up, in almost the entire territory of the country, centres which provided - free of charge - primary health care and family planning and social services for mothers and children, as well as screening for diseases specifically affecting women. In Tunisia, the female mortality rate was under 5 per 1,000, and female life expectancy was 72 years.

33. Although violence against women was negligible, a law on that issue had been enacted in 1993, and shelters had been set up for victims. The penalties for rape were harsh, and included capital punishment.

34. On the economic level, the integration of women was being carried out through a total ban on discrimination in the labour market and by encouraging women to establish small and medium-sized businesses. The personal status code stipulated that women should assume the same responsibilities as men with regard to the family and contribute as far as possible to joint expenditure.

35. Tunisian women could also take part in political life, and were playing an increasingly important role in the management of public affairs. Women accounted for between 8 and 16.4 per cent of representatives in elective bodies. Furthermore, the institutional structures necessary to ensure the follow-up of the Beijing Conference were already in place in Tunisia, in the form of the Ministry of Women and Family Affairs. On the legal level, there were a number of laws guaranteeing equality between men and women, in accordance with the text of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, to which Tunisia was a party.

36. However, the improvement in their own conditions did not leave Tunisian women indifferent to the struggle of women in the rest of the world. She expressed concern at the fate of the millions of women who were victims of war or of such scourges as terrorism, extremism, crime and traffic in women.

37. Her delegation reaffirmed its complete adherence to and support for all United Nations resolutions, particularly those concerning the advancement of women. It called for international solidarity in order to mobilize the financial resources necessary to support efforts to improve the conditions of women. It also called on the Secretary-General to create a high-level post whose incumbent would advise him on gender issues and also help ensure the implementation of the Programme for Action of the Beijing Conference. Lastly, she hoped that the budget restrictions which would be imposed would not affect social issues, in particular those concerning the condition of women and children.

38. Mr. MEHDAD (Syrian Arab Republic) welcomed the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, particularly the provisions concerning education, health, the elimination of violence against women and those dealing with women's active participation in decision-making and in economic development. However, there remained some differences on some issues, and due to the attitude of a group of States which persisted in wishing to impose their views on others, the Platform for Action and other resolutions on women and the family had been accompanied by a number of reservations.

39. His Government regarded the cause of women as an important matter which deserved absolute national priority. Education was one of the first areas in which action in favour of women should be taken. In Syria, education, including at university level, was free, which had made it possible to considerably reduce levels of illiteracy; girls currently accounted for half of all students at all levels of education. Similar initiatives which had been undertaken in health had already had encouraging results, since fertility rates and maternal and infant mortality rates had dropped significantly.

40. In Syria, women received the instruction and training they needed in order to take their rightful place in the labour market and to participate in decision-making. They had the right to equal pay for equal work and were represented in nearly all sectors of public life (including administration, the judiciary, and the diplomatic corps). His Government was currently revising legislation in order to guarantee women's rights in all areas.

41. Thanks to the values, customs and traditions which made it possible to exercise control over morally reprehensible behaviour, violence against women was an almost unknown phenomenon in Syria. However, Syrian women in the occupied Golan, like women in southern Lebanon and the other occupied Arab territories, suffered from the most abhorrent kind of violence: foreign occupation. All the documents adopted by major United Nations conferences confirmed that foreign occupation was one of the principal obstacles to women's enjoyment of their basic rights. If the commitments undertaken at Beijing and elsewhere were not to remain a dead letter, pressure must be put upon Israel to stop subjecting Arab citizens, particularly women, to acts of political and military violence.

42. His Government greatly appreciated existing cooperation with United Nations specialized agencies. The latters' efforts and collaboration with the relevant Syrian bodies had made it possible to implement a number of projects in areas of concern to women and children.

43. The condition of women was one of the main criteria by which the state of development reached by any country could be gauged. His Government was therefore determined to pursue its efforts to fully realize women's rights.

44. Mr. TURNQUEST (Bahamas), speaking on behalf of the 13 States members of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) who were members of the United Nations, said it was unfortunate that the documents critical to substantive discussion of the important question of the advancement of women had been issued at such a late date. He hoped that in future, treatment of that subject would fully reflect its importance and relevance to the work of the Organization.

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45. The delegations members of the Caribbean Community welcomed the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, which had made it possible to build upon gains made at previous conferences. The most important task now was to work towards their prompt implementation, and to guarantee that there were adequate resources for that purpose. There was no time to lose if the targetn which had been set were to be met by the year 2000.

46. The CARICOM countries had already taken some measures; many of them had begun to formulate national plans for the implementation of the Platform for Action. A follow-up meeting had been convened in Trinidad and Tobago at the end of October in order to initiate discussion of a regional implementation plan and a strategy to mobilize resources. On that occasion, the vital role of non-governmental organizations and the need to continue close collaboration with them had been recognized. The importance of the media in the implementation of the Platform for Action had also been recognized.

47. While it was true that the implementation of the Platform for Action was primarily the responsibility of Governments, it should also be emphasized that it was central to have the coordination and collaboration of international agencies, non-governmental organizations and other participants. Gender concerns must be incorporated into all policies and programmes, as requested by the Platform for Action. In that regard, the report of the Secretary-General (A/50/744) contained useful information, and the CARICOM countries shared the concern expressed therein regarding the need to avoid duplication of work. With respect to the establishment of a high-level advisory post in the office of the Secretary-General, the incumbent should be able to devote full attention to the question of the advancement of women. With regard to the proposal to establish a high-level advisory board for the advancement of women, care should be taken to ensure that it did not jeopardize the financing of activities mandated by legislative bodies and would not lead to duplication of work. The States of the Caribbean Community were in favour of the proposal to establish a permanent inter-agency mechanism to oversee the implementation of the Platform for Action system-wide; the role of the Economic and Social Council as the body with overall responsibility for coordination could not be overemphasized in that regard.

48. The Commission on the Status of Women had a critical role in the implementation of the Platform for Action, and the members of the Caribbean Community supported the call for its strengthening in order to permit it to fulfil that important obligation.

49. It was clear that the provision of sufficient resources at all levels was vital to the implementation of the Platform for Action, and the slight increase in the resources requested in the programme budget for 1996-1997 for activities related to the advancement of women was therefore welcome. The Committee for Programme and Coordination and the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions had recognized the need to revise that section of the budget in order to ensure that sufficient resources were available for follow-up to the Beijing Conference.

50. Concerning the improvement of the status of women in the Secretariat, it was encouraging to note that the new management culture was beginning to yield

positive results. However, there was still considerable room for improvement, and no effort should be spared to bring about the necessary changes, particularly in the area of harassment, including sexual harassment. The targets set by the General Assembly for the representation of women in posts subject to geographical distribution had not been met. It was unfortunate that, despite some recent improvements, most women from developing countries, including member countries of the Caribbean Community, remained at the lower levels of the occupational scale.

51. The uncertainty about the future of INSTRAW and UNIFEM adversely affected the effectiveness of their activities. The question of their possible merger must be settled as quickly as possible to enable them to give priority attention to their important work.

52. Concerning the implementation of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women, the States members of the Caribbean Community attached particular importance to the themes of stereotyping of women in the mass media and child and dependant care. The road had been long and arduous, but the Beijing Platform for Action was a remarkable document that should ensure that women were fully integrated into society and were full participants as equal partners in development activities.

53. Mr. NAJEM (Lebanon) said that his country, which had taken the first steps on the road to civil peace and reconstruction, hoped to recover sovereignty over all its territory with the early return of the area under Israeli occupation. At a time when Lebanon was building its capacities, modernizing institutions and increasing equal opportunity for its citizens in all fields, women's issues took on particular importance. There could be no equality while discrimination against women, in both the letter and the spirit of the law, persisted, nor could there be sustainable development unless women were both participants and beneficiaries.

54. No mechanism for the advancement of women had been established in Lebanon since the 1985 Nairobi Conference, owing to the war and the difficult situation prevailing in the country after the conflict. The Israeli occupation of Southern Lebanon and the Western Bekaa had continued since 1978, with adverse effects on the entire population, particularly women. Since 1982, over 300 women had been imprisoned in the Al-Khiyam camp, where they had been subjected to physical and mental torture. More than 60 women had been imprisoned for periods ranging from two to six years, and some were still being held because they had refused to leave their homes and villages and had denounced the Israeli occupation and its inhuman practices. That issue had been mentioned in the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies, which had requested that all the relevant United Nations resolutions should be implemented.

55. The question of the advancement of women and equal opportunity was being given the highest priority and recognition in all sectors. Progress had been made in combating discrimination against women through the revision of laws and regulations in order to extend to women such rights as the right to conduct business without the prior approval of their spouses or to testify in court. The school enrolment ratio for girls had increased at all levels, as had the percentage of women managers, particularly in the production sector, where it

had reached 28 per cent. In 1992, 2.3 per cent of the members of the Chamber of Deputies were women, and a large number of women were currently working in administration.

56. The Lebanese National Commission had drawn up a plan of action for the improvement of the status of women aimed at continuing the process not only in the cities, but also in the rural areas and occupied territories. Lebanon was in the process of reviewing the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, with a view to signing it. In Lebanon, it was believed that it was possible for a woman to combine her role as a mother with her role as a citizen participating actively and productively in society.

57. Mrs. MARENAH-JAMMEH (Gambia) said that international cooperation was vital to the implementation of the objectives established in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. In that regard, special attention should be focused on women in the developing countries, who faced the most pressing problems and suffered from all kinds of discrimination. The follow-up to the Conference should promote measures to minimize the effects of poverty and improve education and health care, including reproductive health.

58. In order to fulfil the commitments made at Beijing, the international community must provide the necessary human and financial resources for activities to promote the advancement of women, and the developing countries must show the necessary political will to improve their status.

59. In the Gambia, women's issues were among national priorities. In 1980, the National Women's Council and Bureau, two bodies with an advisory role to the Government on all matters affecting the welfare of women, had been established. Four out of the 14 cabinet ministers were women, with responsibility for such important sectors as health, social welfare and women's affairs, education, youth and sports, and tourism and culture.

60. The Gambian Government had already taken steps to provide follow-up to the Beijing Platform for Action by establishing a standing advisory committee for the implementation of the Platform; holding a preliminary meeting to set up a multisectoral task force on national policies concerning the role of women in development; and launching an awareness campaign in the mass media.

61. The Beijing Conference had provided an opportunity to review the status of women throughout the world, but the important commitments made must subsequently be put into action.

62. Ms. AUBIN (France), speaking on agenda items 107 and 165, said that 50 years after the equality of men and women had been written into the Charter of the United Nations, the Beijing Fourth World Conference on Women had unambiguously reaffirmed the fact that that principle could be neither called into question nor subordinated to other principles. The Conference had also stressed the fact that equality was both a matter of justice and a precondition for development. Accordingly, the Conference had incorporated the results of the previous major conferences, and in that context the States that had participated in the Beijing Conference had committed themselves to strengthening women's power to act.

63. As stated in the Platform for Action of the Conference, the primary responsibility for its implementation lay with Governments; however, non-governmental organizations, which had been one of the moving forces behind the advancement of women and had played a key role in the Conference through their presence, determination and professionalism, were called upon to feature prominently in that effort. All of the general and sectoral, national and local policies used to implement the Platform must reflect the principle of gender equality and the impact of the measures designed to put it into concrete form. It was time to recognize that women's problems were not just one more issue to be addressed along with the other major problems of today's world, such as poverty, marginalization, violence and socio-economic imbalances, but that they were at the heart of those problems and that women therefore had a key role to play in solving them.

64. From her Government's point of view, the general goal of the activities to be carried out had been clearly defined: it was time to move from de jure equality, which had already been largely achieved in France, to de facto equality, especially in the area of participation in decision-making and in politics. To that end, the French Government had just set up a board of monitors to ensure gender equality, composed of well-known figures from the political, economic and social arenas (men and women with field experience, representatives of non-governmental organizations, intellectuals and researchers). Its mission was to collect and sort data on gender equality at all levels and in all fields, but also to provide the head of Government with proposals for implementing the principle of gender equality; for example, the board of monitors was responsible for giving an opinion on any legislative or regulatory measure which it felt might affect the question of gender equality. In addition, in 1996 the Ministry of Cooperation planned to launch a major cooperation project on an international scale, which would include three major areas of concern to women: training and information, the anti-poverty campaign and women's rights in sexual matters.

65. The Fourth World Conference on Women was the culmination of a long process which had led to the recognition that economic growth and development were inseparable from social development and respect for fundamental human rights. For that reason, the implementation of the conclusions of the Beijing Conference required taking into account the results of earlier conferences and ensuring that the major focuses of the Platform for Action of the Conference were integrated into all United Nations activities and programmes. Those goals were predicated upon the development of new approaches and working methods and, in particular, a closer cooperation with the representatives of civil society, chief among whom were the non-governmental organizations that dealt with women and children. In that context, the United Nations organs whose specific mission it was to promote the role of women should be enabled to exercise their functions of initiative, advice, expertise and monitoring effectively. Their working methods and the human and financial resources allocated to them within the framework of the United Nations budget should be adapted to the expansion of that role.

66. States, non-governmental organizations and the international community should join forces to defeat the obstacles to the implementation of the

recommendations and decisions of the Beijing Conference. France was resolved to add its assistance and support to that effort.

67. Mr. ARDA (Turkey), speaking on agenda items 107 and 165, said that Turkey had always been an active participant in international efforts to improve the status of women, and in that spirit it had participated in the Beijing Conference.

68. Turkey had maintained close ties of cooperation with the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) and strongly believed that, if it merged with the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), the role and functions of INSTRAW should be preserved. His delegation considered the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women to be a major legal instrument, and it welcomed the report of the Secretary-General on the status of the Convention (A/50/346) and the report of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) (A/50/38). Turkey, which was a member of CEDAW, would seek to be represented for another term on the Committee when its expert's current term expired.

69. Turkey welcomed the appointment of a Special Rapporteur on violence against women and the report of the Secretary-General on violence against women migrant workers (A/50/378). It supported all efforts to eliminate such violence. Similarly, it hoped that every individual directly or indirectly responsible for the crimes committed against the women of Bosnia and Herzegovina would be brought before the International Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia.

70. In Turkey, current government efforts to improve the status of women were strongly focused on enhancing women's participation in political life, but also on improving their situation in the fields of education, employment and health and, in general, facilitating their full participation in all aspects of socio-economic life. To that end, the Ministry of State responsible for women's status and problems, in cooperation with other State agencies, had undertaken the collection of gender-based statistics, developed programmes of vocational and technical education for girls and a policy of credit for women entrepreneurs, incorporated women's human rights in the curricula of human rights education in secondary schools, launched public awareness campaigns and developed measures to eliminate violence against women. Turkey was also committed to changing the few provisions of its legislation which were opposed to gender equality and to withdrawing its reservations to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. It planned to increase the literacy level of women and to reduce the rates of maternal and infant mortality by at least 50 per cent. To that end, it had identified national action plans and strategies and was ready to engage in regional and international cooperation to carry out its commitments in accordance with the principles recognized by the international community.

71. Ms. MORGAN-MOSS (Panama), speaking on behalf of the Central American States (Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama) on agenda items 107 and 165, said that the relevant programmes should cover all sectors and all areas of activity of the United Nations if the implementation of the decisions adopted at the Beijing Conference were to have any lasting effect.

The report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women: action for equality, development and peace (A/50/744) was a step in that direction. With reference to that report, the Panamanian delegation was of the view that the Senior Adviser to the Secretary-General, who was referred to in paragraph 56 of the report and whose role would be to assist the Secretary-General in ensuring that the gender perspective was integrated into overall policy-making and programming, should be a woman. Her delegation also agreed with the statement in paragraph 92 of the report affirming the importance of "the continued mobilization of all elements of civil society in promoting an effective follow-up to the Conference" and hoped that the Commission on the Status on Women would establish appropriate mechanisms to enhance collaboration with non-governmental organizations. In that connection, at the meeting of the working group on the review of the arrangements for consultations with non-governmental organizations provided for in resolution 1296 (XLIV) of the Economic and Social Council, dated 23 May 1968, which was due to be held in early 1996, Member States should demonstrate their awareness of the urgent need to provide support for the efforts of non-governmental organizations.

72. Reform of the structure and functioning of the United Nations must go hand in hand with a change in philosophy. It was not always advisable to seek to adopt decisions unanimously: attempting to paper over differences only worsened the problems. Judging from the experience of Beijing, it might be better to organize extensive discussions on the follow-up to the Conference, whose results should not be prejudged by the Organization and which would permit Member States to engage in dialogue and to openly express their differences. The discussions would also enable the Organization to better gauge its chances of being able to mobilize the international community into acting quickly, effectively and with solidarity on behalf on women.

73. Mr. GUILLEN (Peru) said that his country recognized the value of women's participation in national life and that that was the message behind the Peruvian President's attendance at the Beijing Conference. In October, the Congress of the Republic had established a special commission on women to ensure the implementation of the Platform for Action adopted by the Conference.

74. There was currently some improvement in the status of women in Peru. Women enjoyed greater access to education, including higher education, and an increasing number of them worked in professional and technical posts and occupied management positions, including in public administration and in Congress.

75. Women played a prominent role in the social field. It was mostly women who created and managed grassroots organizations, especially the 7,000 to 8,000 canteens that served more than 2 million people throughout the country and the nearly 13,000 community milk committees. All of those organizations were managed by women, most of whom were mothers of modest station. Those courageous women, moreover, had formed the basis for civil resistance to the violence engendered by terrorist groups. The violence had resulted in the internal displacement of 600,000 families. Of that number, 468,000, or nearly 3 million people, had women heads of household. The Government was working to facilitate the return of displaced families to their places of origin. Given the prominent

role played by women as supporters of their families, agents of the country's economic recovery and development and participants in the fight against poverty, the Government had adopted a population policy aimed at granting women greater access to information on family planning methods, to enable them to freely decide the number of their children, without recourse to abortion. The Government was also pursuing efforts to prevent all forms of violence against women. Lastly, it was seeking to consolidate a new social image of women by rolling back the prejudices that persisted in that area, supporting equality for women and their entry into the labour market, and eliminating all forms of discrimination against them. The general policy of the State was to grant Peruvian women an active role in the nation's development.

76. Ms. AHLUWALIA (Director of the External Relations Department of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies) recalled that the mission of the International Federation was to improve the situation of the world's most vulnerable people, the majority of whom were women and their dependants. Women in fact accounted for a large proportion of the nearly 100 million economic migrants and the millions of refugees and displaced persons.

77. That tide of humanity daily experienced violations of their fundamental human rights and violence. Women had been made specific targets of violence in conflict situations. Uncounted women had been victims of sexual abuse in such areas as the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda. In Afghanistan, Angola, Cambodia and Mozambique, women were either the direct victims of land mines or the caretakers of victims. Other women had to cope with the burden resulting from the imposition of sanctions, as in the case of Iraq. In large areas of the world, particularly in central Europe and the former Soviet Union, deterioration of the health of women and children represented an emerging social disaster. And lastly, women, especially young women, were increasingly vulnerable to AIDS.

78. The International Federation which she represented therefore welcomed the Platform for Action adopted at Beijing, and in particular the recommendations relating to women and health, women in armed conflict, and the human rights of women. On the subject of health, efforts must be made to ensure that health care, including family planning services, were accessible to all women within the framework of humanitarian assistance programmes. In that connection, it was also very important to ensure that countries were provided with safe blood supplies.

79. The protection of women who were refugees, internally displaced or affected by occupation or armed conflict was of special interest to the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. Measures must be taken to eliminate gender-specific violence and to provide victims of such violence with long-term social and psychological support. Finally, Governments must undertake additional legislative and practical measures to protect the fundamental rights of women. Indeed, the actual enjoyment of their rights by women should be a key indicator of the level of social and economic development reached by a country. In that connection, international and local organizations should inform communities, including women, about their human and legal rights. National Red Cross and Red Crescent societies played an important role in dissemination activities related

to international humanitarian law. They also provided training for women in such areas as disaster preparedness, first aid and community-based health care.

80. All those who had taken part in the Beijing Conference considered the outcome to be positive. They now had a collective responsibility to duly implement the strategic objectives decided upon, in cooperation with Governments, United Nations organizations, international organizations and non-governmental organizations. The Federation which she represented would follow up on relevant aspects of the Platform for Action adopted at Beijing within the framework of its own policies and programmes. It would consider the Platform for Action, including the specific issue of the impact of armed conflict on women, when the International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent was held in Geneva, in early December.

The meeting rose at 1.05 p.m.